

have trained me, who have disciplined me, who have inspired me. They performed the same duty I did that cold night in 1945. They have helped me fill out the forms. I have learned from them, have had the wisdom to work with you and others to put together these legislative measures for their benefit.

So I close my last words thanking all those in uniform who have so generously given to me their wisdom, their friendship, their inspiration, and their courage to do what little I have been able to do as a Senator to help me fill out the forms and put my X on this my last bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, Madam President, the men and women of this Nation would be grateful to JOHN WARNER if they knew him, had that honor of knowing him. They have been benefitted by him even though they will never know him. Maybe as a 17-year-old sailor back in 1945, the last thing in his mind was that he would ever be a Senator. There is something about this Nation that makes it possible for men and women—in this case a man such as JOHN WARNER—to rise to the very top of the respect of his country men and women. It has been a true pleasure and honor to serve with him.

I, again, will have more to say about that next week. But I, again, wish to thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

Mr. WARNER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEVIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Ms. LANDRIEU pertaining to the introduction of S. 3647 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

HIGHER EDUCATION DISASTER AND EMERGENCY RELIEF LOAN PROGRAM

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, this past August the President signed into law the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which reauthorized programs for postsecondary and higher education. Contained within the reauthorization is the Education Disaster and Emergency Relief Loan Program. The bill established a loan program within the U.S. Department of Education to provide critically needed low interest guaranteed loans to institutions in the event of catastrophic natural or man-made disasters.

The colleges and universities in Louisiana, particularly those in the New Orleans area, remain in many ways fi-

nancially crippled by Hurricane Katrina. Three years after Katrina and Rita devastated Louisiana and Mississippi these institutions still have nearly \$700 million in unrecovered losses. The estimates for Gustav and Ike are still not finalized but at this stage the damage is purported to be at least \$46 million to state colleges and universities alone.

Before Katrina, the 11 colleges and universities in the New Orleans area educated 70,000 students. Today that number is only 50,000 but it continues to slowly rebound. This growth comes despite the fact that our institutions of higher education experienced more than \$1 billion in physical damages and operational losses due to the 2005 hurricanes and have recovered less than half of those losses. Higher education institutions are the largest employers in New Orleans both before and after Katrina. The higher education industry in New Orleans continues to attract millions of research dollars and supports industries as diverse as biotechnology, aerospace and medicine. The work of each institution in the city can be seen in every aspect of the region's recovery, from the redesign of the city's troubled public schools to coastal restoration and hurricane protection to the provision of health care across the region. They engage in this important work even as they continue to struggle with mounting revenue losses, buildings that remain in disrepair due to flooding and the loss of key faculty and staff.

I call today on the Secretary of Education to make the Education Disaster Loan program a top regulatory priority. It is my understanding that some Department of Education officials have said that they will not promulgate regulations on any newly create programs in the Higher Education Act until funds are appropriated. This simply is not acceptable. This issue has become a major roadblock in the current disaster funding process, and it is my hope that the Secretary and the Department will move expeditiously to establish regulations so that the program may provide crucial assistance to the colleges and universities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike and the Midwest Floods.

This is a program I was proud to author, design, shepherd through the last Congress to help all the colleges and universities that have been so hard hit, and a portion of the community development block grant loans that we have provided could possibly go to help our universities.

NEW ORLEANS REGION HOSPITAL DISASTER FUNDING

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I rise to highlight the continued and critical need for post-Katrina health care recovery funding for those hospitals that have struggled to this day to provide critical medical services in the New Orleans region. The Congress has been ex-

tremely helpful to the State of Louisiana in providing funding support for many Katrina and Rita recovery purposes. However, minimal assistance has been provided to enable the greater New Orleans area hospitals to maintain adequate and required health care operations. The affected hospitals, specifically East Jefferson General Hospital, Ochsner Health System, Touro Infirmary, Tulane Medical Center, University Hospital, and West Jefferson Medical Center, provided over 90 percent of all regional hospital-based health care, and are expected to do so for at least the next five years. It is vitally important that this health care base be maintained in order to preserve other recovery efforts throughout the region.

Louisiana hospital executives have testified before Congress concerning the post-Katrina health care funding crisis caused by escalating expenses that significantly outpaced revenues, with no immediate stabilization expected; post-Katrina labor expenses that increased by \$140 million; non-labor expenses—i.e. utilities, insurance, interest, bad debts—that increased by \$300 million; and fewer skilled healthcare professionals. The regional hospitals are experiencing reduced bond ratings—with defaults looming—increased marketing and recruiting expenses, and even a loss of leadership. The Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General—OIG—and the General Accounting Office, through extensive and voluntary audits, have objectively validated the magnitude of these post-Katrina financial losses and the demonstrated need for New Orleans regional hospital disaster assistance.

To stabilize critical health care services in the region, the New Orleans area hospitals require a federal funding "bridge" as they transition to a firmer economic base through adjusted wage indexes and other revenue streams. The hospitals are at a critical tipping point in financial losses, and each is determining the steps necessary to remain medically and fiscally sound. Without funding support, the potential reduction in health care services will impact the fragile recovery of the entire New Orleans region.

In the pending appropriations bill now before this body, Social Service Block Grant funding is provided to partially address health care and other needs resulting from Katrina, Rita and other hurricanes and natural disasters. I intend to work closely with the President, the Secretary of Department of Health and Human Services, and other Federal officials to ensure that sufficient block grant funding is provided to the New Orleans regional hospitals to ensure the stability of health care services in the Katrina-affected regions.

Again, I was instrumental in crafting this program to help hospitals that, with the electricity off and the city underwater, stayed open by the sheer